



## International Walk to School



## International Walk to School Month Organizers Guide

A partnership of:



Ecology Action Centre



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## About International Walk to School Month

One of the biggest events of the year for the Ecology Action Centre's Child and Youth Active Transportation program is the International Walk to School Month during October. Around the world, the month of October is dedicated to the promotion of active transportation to school and other places kids go. Active transportation means any non-motorized mode such as walking, cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding, scootering, wheel chairing, cross-country skiing, canoeing, etc.

Students from countries all over the world participate in International Walk to School Month. More than 40 countries take part each year. The event encourages students to walk, cycle, in-line skate or skateboard to school with parents, school staff and community leaders. Walking to school is an easy way to add more physical activity to the daily lives of students, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and fight climate change. The event is a terrific opportunity to learn safe routes to school and safety skills for walking and wheeling, make friends, help out the environment and increase safety in and around schools zones – plus it's tons of fun!



## What do we do?

The Ecology Action Centre's Transportation team encourages more Nova Scotian children, youth and their families to use active transportation – such as walking and cycling – for the environment, physical activity and traffic safety.

We aim to:

- ✓ Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution from cars
- ✓ Increase physical activity
- ✓ Increase traffic safety

Our Child and Youth Active Transportation initiatives are delivered in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage.

## Why Walk?

- ✓ It rocks
- ✓ It's fun!
- ✓ It's Healthy!
- ✓ It Reduces Stress and Increases Attentiveness!
- ✓ It's Non-polluting!
- ✓ It's Social!
- ✓ It teaches Safe Pedestrian Skills!
- ✓ It's Educational!
- ✓ It's Economical!
- ✓ It takes back the streets!

## Who's Doing it?

ALL schools as well as youth-serving groups and organizations can participate in International Walk to School Month! Urban, suburban, rural – everyone can join in! Distance or infrastructure may be an obstacle for some schools, so all we need is a little imagination. What really counts is that students start walking! Bussed students can participate too! Involve them in walking activities at school.

## How to include bussing students:

- ✓ Involve your bussing population at lunch time for 20 minutes.
- ✓ Walk around the school (bicycles, skateboards and roller blades welcome if facility permits).
- ✓ Have a group walk in the local community.
- ✓ Take a trek on a nearby trail.
- ✓ Walk around the gymnasium.

Remember school bus safety at all times. See [www.schoolbussafety.ca](http://www.schoolbussafety.ca) for details.

## Steps for organizing an International Walk to School Month event

This guide covers six easy steps to “walk” you through organizing your International Walk to School Month event. Join schools around the world as they celebrate walking during the month of October. Make the event your own by encouraging physical activity, safe transportation, environmental stewardship and walkable communities in a unique way. Pick a day, a week, one day per week or the entire month to celebrate. Get ready to be creative, healthy and have fun!

Actively promoting Walk to School for a month could also transition smoothly into the launch of a year-round program such as We Often Walk or Wheel – WOW ([www.ecologyaction.ca/wow](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/wow)). For more on the Ecology Action Centre's programs and events offered throughout the year, see [www.ecologyaction.ca](http://www.ecologyaction.ca) or contact us at (902) 442-0209 or [stp@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:stp@ecologyaction.ca).

### Step 1: Partners

Recruit parent and staff volunteers:

- ✓ Make a call for volunteers at Parent Council meetings, through newsletters and through any form of communication to parents.
- ✓ Invite a teacher or two to help in organizing the event.
- ✓ Sign them up to walk to school with the students.
- ✓ Enlist their help to coordinate the event by delegating tasks.

Invite public authorities to join in to walk with the students to school:

- ✓ Invite the mayor, municipal councilors, police officers, firefighters, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Members of Parliament (MP), Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA), professional athletes and local celebrities.
- ✓ Invite guest speakers to address safety, health and/or environmental issues at your event (police officers, public health nurses, bike safety groups, etc.).

Find Community Partners:

- ✓ Approach local businesses for donations of prizes or incentives.
- ✓ Approach local businesses for juice and snack donations for the event.
- ✓ Recruit community groups like Rotary Clubs, Block Parents or other community volunteers to help organize and promote the event.

## Step 2: Path

Establish a safe route to school:

- ✓ Outline the safest route to school and notify participants and their parents.
- ✓ Be sure to mark Block Parent houses and other safe havens on your route map.
- ✓ Determine a meeting place or different pick-up zones so that everyone can walk together.
- ✓ Invite community police officers to provide extra road safety during the event.
- ✓ Ask volunteers to form a crosswalk patrol or act as crossing guards for the event, and continue the patrol throughout the year.

## Step 3: Promotion

Spread the word:

- ✓ Put up International Walk to School Month posters wherever possible (included in your Organizer Kit).
- ✓ Have students create colourful posters with the date of the event and post them in public and school libraries, in groceries stores, in community centres, in sports centres, etc.
- ✓ Send out Public Service Announcements (PSA), municipal proclamations and news releases (see the Appendices for examples).

Invite Local Media:

- ✓ Media often have special sections or segments for community events. Have local newspaper, TV stations and radio stations cover the event by calling them up or sending them a news release.
- ✓ Tell the Ecology Action Centre Transportation office of your plans – it can help in promoting your event. Contact us at (902) 442-0209 or [asrts@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:asrts@ecologyaction.ca).

## Step 4: Participation

Have fun stuff for the students:

- ✓ Create an intra-school competition by awarding a Golden Shoe Award (spray paint or decorate an old sneaker) to the class or grade level with the highest participation – make sure that teachers keep track of who participates!
- ✓ Dress up the school mascot and cheerleaders in fun outfits, and make sure they are in attendance for the event.

- ✓ Design and order International Walk to School hats, T-shirts and other materials for students

Get Students Involved:

- ✓ Have students make poems, songs, skits, stories or paragraphs about active transportation to present as a Public Address announcement or at an assembly.
- ✓ Hold an assembly or set aside class time with an active transportation theme to teach students the benefits of walking and cycling to school – clean air, increased physical activity, better health, a sense of community, increased pedestrian safety, and more!
- ✓ Have students create an International Walk to School Month banner to display outside of the school.
- ✓ Encourage students to make signs, buttons, hats, scarves, sashes, etc., to wear and hold while walking to school.
- ✓ Hold a “Walk to Breakfast” event and have healthy food for students when they arrive at school.

## Step 5: Put on the Event

Here are a few ideas of things you can do during your Walk to School Month Event:

- ✓ Adopt the WOW program and designate weekly walking days to encourage walking one day a week for a month or all year long. Register at [www.ecologyaction.ca/wow](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/wow).
- ✓ Develop walking themes for each day of the week: bright, highly visible colors day, “walking hat” day, bring a healthy lunch day, etc.
- ✓ Fill the month with activities throughout each day or week that pertain to staying physically fit, eating healthy and caring for the environment.
- ✓ Offer an option to students who ride the bus or carpool to walk once they arrive at school.
- ✓ Organize a walking school bus from nearby neighborhoods. For information or to register go to [www.ecologyaction.ca/walking-school-bus](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/walking-school-bus).
- ✓ Organize pedestrian, cycling, in-line skating or skateboarding safety skills workshops – contact Active & Safe Routes to School about Making Tracks safety training at (902) 442-0209 or [asrts@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:asrts@ecologyaction.ca). Learn more at [www.ecologyaction.ca/making-tracks](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/making-tracks).
- ✓ Tackle speeding in your neighbourhood by launching the Pace Car anti-speeding program during your event. Learn more at [www.ecologyaction.ca/pacecar](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/pacecar).
- ✓ Use Active & Safe Routes to School program resources to teach students about healthy living, transportation safety and the environment (see [www.ecologyaction.ca/issue-area/transportation-projects](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/issue-area/transportation-projects)).
- ✓ Have games outside...make it a play day!
- ✓ Plan a school-wide event to recognize the day such as a picnic, an assembly, an awards ceremony or a pizza party for the class with the most walkers.
- ✓ Have a walk-a-thon.
- ✓ Supply healthy snacks.
- ✓ Host safety and activity booths.
- ✓ Set up a competition with awards for the classes with the most walkers - make it an inter-class or inter-grade friendly competition. Consider challenging another school.
- ✓ Have a shoe fashion show.
- ✓ Carry Signs. Wear hats.
- ✓ Have a special assembly with songs, special presentations and guest speakers.
- ✓ Use your imagination! See the next page for even more ideas.

## Step 6: Pat on the Back

- ✓ Complete our Feedback Form for a chance to win prizes in a draw. The form will be sent out to all participating schools and groups and must be submitted by the end of October.
- ✓ Share your experience! Send us artwork, photos, articles, your highlights and memories of the event. Be sure to include permission and send them to [asrts@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:asrts@ecologyaction.ca).
- ✓ Continue taking active transportation to school! Start a walking club and use WOW to promote it. Start a Walking or Cycling School Bus.
- ✓ Begin School Travel Planning at your school to ensure students can use active school travel all year long. Learn more at [www.saferoutesns.ca](http://www.saferoutesns.ca).

For assistance, contact us at Active & Safe Routes to School, Ecology Action Centre, at (902) 442-0209, [asrts@ecologyaction.ca](mailto:asrts@ecologyaction.ca) or [www.ecologyaction.ca/iwalk](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/iwalk).

## Ideas from Other Schools

- “We have a Walking School Bus event where staff meet students at five routes and everyone walks to school. A healthy snack is then distributed.”
- Hold a “Find Freddy” activity during the week with prizes awarded to those that handed in their sheets. Use the WOW cards during the week so the kids can track their walking at home or to and from school.
- Make announcements during the week and put up IWALK posters. Include an early bird (before school starts) walk or activity on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- Have hiking and cycling as part of Physical Education class. During intramurals, have discussions about active transportation.
- “Our Physical Education classes walked for the first 10 minutes of each class during the week. We also opened the gym at lunchtime for students to come and participate by walking around the gym.”
- Have students, staff and community members join representatives from the Heart and Stroke Foundation for a walk.
- “We invited students and parents to join us at a landmark in town, where we were joined with the principal and administrators. We had coffee and homemade muffins and as a group and we all walked to school together.”

- Have the entire school's staff and children walk together on group outings a number of times throughout October.
- "In the days prior to our event we promoted walking as a healthy form of exercise that is easy to do. We then had a Beach Sweep (cleaning the local beach) and walked the 20 min. to the beach, 1 hour along the beach, and then another 20 min. back. By doing so, we helped benefit our bodies and at the same time helped the environment by cleaning up the beach. It was a beautiful, sunny day and everyone enjoyed themselves immensely."
- One municipality invited the Grade 12s to the local hall for speeches, breakfast and then the walk to school.
- "We had Walk to School Wednesdays. The kids were encouraged to walk to school in the morning and at lunch."
- Invite all students to the gym early in the morning and walk laps, tracking progress to see how many kilometers are walked.
- Have a Walking Month Challenge and encourage students to meet the collective goal of 5000 laps (or other goal) around the school property or to and from school.

## **Appendix A: Municipal Proclamation Sample**

[City/Municipality letterhead]  
Proclamation

International Walk to School Month  
(date)

Whereas: [City/Municipality name] annual International Walk to School Month will be held in October.

Whereas: this event, taking place across Canada, will focus on the benefits of walking rather than driving to school, creating cleaner, safer and environmentally healthier school neighbourhoods for our children; and

Whereas: this event affords parents and caregivers the opportunity to spend more time with their children; reduces car use and traffic hazards; promotes physical activity and contributes to a safer community.

Now therefore: I, [Name of Mayor], Mayor of [City/Municipality name], do hereby proclaim October, as International Walk to School Month and encourage everyone to participate in this very worthwhile event.

[Signature of Mayor]

[Mayor's name]

## **Appendix B: Public Service Announcement Sample**

Attention all parents and caregivers! If you have children in school, get out your favourite walking shoes! In October, students at [insert your school's name] and across Canada will be asking you to participate in International Walk to School Month. This special event is being held to demonstrate support for the increase of physical activity, cleaner air, fighting climate change, and less traffic congestion around schools. So join us and walk your kids to school. [Insert date, time, meeting place, contact information, etc. for your event.]

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[Insert name, phone and email of a school contact for the media here]

## Appendix C: News Release Sample

**[Insert name of your school] Participates in International Walk to School Month:**  
Students and parents walk for safety, health and a cleaner environment

On [insert date], [Insert name of your school] will join hundreds of schools across Canada as they participate in International Walk to School Month in October. The special event will see parents and students leave the family vehicle at home in favour of getting to class on their own two feet. For students that are bussed to school, they will participate in walking activities at school. International Walk to School Month is designed to make streets and communities safer, increase physical activity levels of students and improve our environment.

[Insert other details of your event here: date, time, meeting place, contact information, etc.]

It is hoped that the campaign will begin to reverse the habit of driving to school – a habit that has clearly become ingrained. In Canada, neighbourhood schools report more than 50% of the student body is frequently chauffeured to school.

ParticipAction gives Canadian kids a low grade in its annual report card on physical activity levels. They give kids a D for use of active transportation. Some of the health risks of inactivity include earlier onset of heart disease, osteoporosis, Type II Diabetes and high blood pressure.

Improved health is not the only benefit of walking. Additional advantages include a healthier environment and safer communities. Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced when people choose non-motorized transportation, which is an important factor in improving air quality. Traffic congestion around schools is also reduced, and neighbourhood life is revitalized by the increased presence of people on the streets.

For more information on International Walk to School Month visit the Ecology Action Centre at [www.ecologyaction.ca/iwalk](http://www.ecologyaction.ca/iwalk).

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[Insert name, phone and email of a school contact for the media here]